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Neurosys: On the Fictional Psychopathology of Abstract Horror.

The 'fact' that *Neurosys is not exactly neurosis* might be clarifying, if neurosis were only anything, whatsoever, even merely itself. In the absence of such convenient preconditions, a more elliptical definition is required. The sheer *scale* of this ellipse, it turns out, exhausts our topic long before its resolution. If this seems irritating, for no good reason, then it has begun.[1]

At first, 'Neurosys' seems only to say 'nervous system', in some compressed format. It is not the central nervous system, however, or even the nervous system of a distinct, individuated organism, as those words would commonly be understood. Neurosys is a notional machine encompassing all terrestrial nerve traffic,[2] determined with whatever degree of abstract nominalism is required to ensure the necessity of its existence. There cannot *but* be an instantiated set of all neural tissue clusters. Any specific instance of brain activity belongs *inside* it, if only by formal definition.

Realism begins as a subtraction of attachment to illusion – as disillusionment. To determine it more positively, from the beginning, would be already unrealistic (in exactly the way that naïve realism is unrealistic). Reality hides.[3] The cover for Neurosys is already understood, to the point of disappearance. In noting this subtraction, obsessive semiotic tics seek to impose themselves. Each time 'neurosis' is mentioned, it prompts scare quotes, and marks of ontological repudiation. 'Neurosis' *if it was anything*, the tacit qualification proceeds. We can assume it, going forward, which is to say, we can assume that (only) nothing at all can be assumed. A groundless extreme

[1] It would be immediately reasonable to object: "Why begin any kind of discussion of 'Neurosys' when *I have never previously heard the term*?" Really, you haven't? *How could you possibly know?* Neurosys is the thought one is spared from, when thinking neurosis instead. Alternatively, in a clinical register, it is the psychotic delusion adequate to the cultural-historical phenomenon of neurosis. Or (finally?) it is that, defined in relation to neurosis, whose meaning is exhausted by its reality. Not only something for later, then, but the something-for-later *in-itself*.

[2] Tacking on extraterrestrial neurologies would be conceptually facile. But that would be weird.

[3] See Heraclitus, Fragment 123: "nature loves to hide."

irritability is our sole phenomenon. 'Hypothetically …' we might say – but that isn't it. Nothing is it.

Neurosys will come to evoke the suggestion – which very quickly becomes *horrible* – of *another nervous system*. A system, then, that envelops the nervous system as we think, or imagine, that we know it, while even more certainly – which is to say, already repetitively, by formal scientific necessity – *running it* (with all of its – all of *our* – thoughts, knowings, and imaginings, thus enveloped). The morbid tangle is further complicated by the impact of such abstracted systematicity upon the nerves. Nonlinearity, metanoia, and anomalous waves pulse through it. The extent to which the idea appears simply fantastic gauges the degree to which certain protective idealist conceptions – and, more specifically, anthropomorphic scale-privileges – are being maintained. In the absence of gratuitous philosophical fanaticism, the preservation of such defenses is wholly unobjectionable. What c*an* be defended, most certainly *may* – and even *should* – be. The alternative can only be, unavoidably, bad.

'Neurosys' is a proper name. As it emerges from neurosis, it subtracts generality. At the expense of convenient adjectival usage, it acquires singularity, through the methodical reification of an ontological devastation we have yet 'properly' to introduce. Its own groundlessness is returned as an occult entity. Suspect a larger pattern, flattened onto the machinery of suspicion itself, and that's Neurosys happening. It's nothing but coordination, running ahead of anything that can be accepted as plausibly achievable – an incipient paranoid construction from the start. While there are vague models of a 'meta-brain' – actualizations of human social intelligence – which have broken out into cultural circulation, Neurosys isn't any of them. It's coming from another angle, entirely. Sociology was only ever its prey.

According to the most obvious fictional construction, 'Neurosys' – the word – was built in such a way that it could have been said cryptically, or accidentally, perhaps for centuries, without being heard as such. Neurosis was only semiotic skin. How deeply have the invocations of Neurosys been buried within obscure oral traditions, mis-registered (at times) in countless dusty and forgotten transcriptions of medical pronouncement? What post-larval monstrosity now emerges from the cocoon of dead medicine?

In raising this suggestion, the final step is pre-empted. Neurosys says, fundamentally, that neurosis belongs to horror now. The compact is sealed beyond all realistic prospect of dissolution. At the same time, the fibers of attachment binding neurosis to anything

else whatsoever – even to its own intrinsic existence – have attenuated to the point of generalized rupture. It has been torn down into the abyss.

Since the word 'neurosis' was coined by Scottish physician William Cullen (or 'Old Spasm')[4] in 1769, it has designated a psychological excess. There was too much of it, from the beginning. Medicine was compelled to catalog what it could not proportionately or locally explain, and it did so under this name. That there was necessarily (or tautologically) too much neurosis – or extravagant 'neurotic' reactivity – meant, implicitly, too little of something else. The term was summoned from a deficiency of definite physiological grounding. After known etiologies had been subtracted, it was what remained. If not positively *supernatural* it was at least – by default – paranatural.[5] The exorbitant scientific commitment would take a while to worry anyone.

Cullen's short, initial definition of the neuroses, in his *First Lines of the Practice of Physic* (Part II), consists of four parts. Each is devoted to a rough genus of excessive affections, connected primarily through their common deficiency of determinable ground.[6]

[4] William Cullen (1710-90), the inventor of neurosis, was a prominent figure of the Scottish Enlightenment, and is described by Stott R. Health as 'the leading British physician of the 18th century'. He held the position of professor at the Edinburgh Medical School, when this institution represented the frontier of medical education in the English-speaking world. Cullen was, quite literally, physician to the Scottish Enlightenment, personally doctoring David Hume. His circle of friends included Adam Smith, Lord Kames, Joseph Black, John Millar, and Adam Ferguson, among others. Neurosis appeared within the intellectual milieu of spontaneous order, and the moral sociology of 'sympathy'. That Cullen was known (affectionately?) as 'Old Spasm' scarcely requires explanation, but some background can be found in Penelope Hunting's "Old Spasm': William Cullen (1710-90)' extracted online: http://jmb.sagepub.com/content/18/4/216.extract.

[5] Comparable paranatural (or pseudo-supernatural) surplus effect is evidenced by the placebo. It is perhaps unsurprising that Cullen, a pioneer of groundless medicine, would be 'foundational' figure in relation to this lineage, also. See 'William Cullen and a missing mind-body link in the early history of placebos' (CE Kerr, I Milne, and TJ Kaptchuk). http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2254457/

[6] Neurosis is introduced into world history, as a word, and a medical category, in Part II of Cullen's *First Lines of the Practice of Physic,* under the heading *Of neuroses, or nervous diseases*. He writes (section MXCI): "In this place, I propose to comprehend, under the title of NEUROSES, all those preternatural affections of sense or motion which

Neuroses are categorized under the "preternatural affections of sense or motion" with a double negative qualification. They do not result from fever ("pyrexia") or localized organic disorders ("topical affection of the organs" or "*morbus localis*"). Their cause is, instead, "a more general affection of the nervous system". Neurosis is thus a physiological *abstraction*. While nothing *other* than a medical ailment, it carries medicine into an interior desolation, where all tracks are erased. Nothing leads to neurosis, in any way that 18th century medical science could recognize. In the strictest, but also in the most common sense, then, neurosis is an *over-reaction*. It overflows what can be confidently accounted for, at whatever level of scrutiny. Disproportionate illness has been its most reliable signature, and even something close to its definition. At the limit – to which it intrinsically tends – it divides by zero, as an infinitely disproportionate response to nothing. We will not get there. (Nobody ever gets there.)

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are without pyrexia, as a part of the primary disease; and all those which do not depend upon a topical affection of the organs, but upon a more general affection of the nervous system, and of those powers of the system upon which sense and motion more especially depend."

He sub-divides the neuroses into four groups of afflictions: Comata, Adynamia, Spasmi, and Vesaniae.

Comata are "those affections which have been commonly called the Soporose diseases; but they are most properly distinguished by their consisting in some interruption or suppression of the powers of sense and voluntary motion, or of what are called the animal functions." They are represented most distinctly by Apoplexy and Palsy.

Adynamia is "a disease in which the action of the heart and respiration become considerably weaker than usual, or in which, for a certain time, these functions cease altogether." Spasmi, or Spasmodic Affections, notably include "hysteric paroxysm".

Finally, the Vesaniae tilt into the realm of the psychoses. Cullen quotes Terence, XXXV:

··· *incerta haec si tu postules*

Ratione *certa facere, nihilo plus agas,*

Quam *si des operam, ut cum ratione insanias*

("if you require reason to make that certain which is uncertain, you are simply attempting to go mad by the rules of reason"). It is irresistible, anticipatively, to describe this warning as Lovecraftian.

The First Lines of the Practice of Physic (4 volumes, 1776-84) is available online at: https://archive.org/details/firstlinesofprac13cull

"[T]he term Neuroses is new, and I do not vouch for its propriety," Cullen cautions. "We have to premise no general theory of the class; for the several orders have no foundation in one common affection." Groundlessness – abysm – is the primordial characteristic, and the foundation of its categorical unification. Whatever has been the real correlate of the neurotic phenomenon, left nameless by Cullen – and by default merely 'nature', or more specifically uncharted physiology – is *exactly* what we now call Neurosys (formally, nominally, and thus of necessity). Neurosys is secured transcendentally against error insofar as it designates nothing at all beside the real unknown, for which the cultural production of neurosis is the symptom.

Neurosis and medical science, we now know, were never destined for any greater intimacy than Cullen had essentially achieved in the 18th century. In the rift between neurotic disproportion, and scientific measure, the psychoanalytic episode was hatched. Psychoanalysis found a great deal to say about neurosis, and sought also to make neurosis speak. Yet it failed – eventually – to persuasively demonstrate that anything was there (in the zone worth touching (for money)). By the final decades of the last century, its scientific credibility, which was never based upon anything besides rhetorical genius, had evaporated in the blazing forges of neurology and – more specifically – neuropharmacology. Almost certainly, its eventual fate is to be remembered as a repository of fantastic hypotheses. This speculation is consistent with the evidence that literature is already laying claim to the corpse,[7] in accordance with a pact prepared from both sides, and long in the making.

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[7] There are political eccentrics who claim to still make psychoanalysis twitch. The sincerity of such claims is, however, increasingly questionable – and even deliberately clownish. Such comedy, too, has a pedigree, though one that remained until recently predominantly devoid of self-consciousness, and thus of transparent cynicism. It is exhibited most elaborately in Freud's 'Project for a Scientific Psychology'. *So, how's that working out?* This is not a remark restricted to low mockery. It is (also) the request for a story. Freud precedes psychoanalysis with a rough draft of what would become its executioner.

The fabled psychoanalytical grounding of the neuroses, in the Oedipus complex, came next. Perhaps we should be bored of Oedipus by now, as Deleuze and Guattari recommend, but it's difficult to be. Schizoanalysis and psychiatric medicine concur in deriding it. Our suspicion, rather, is that the Oedipus complex is far more enthralling than psychoanalysis ever allowed it to be. It is far less a determinate concept, which is to say a potential component of generalizable solutions, than a resilient problem. The riddle of the Sphinx is an intrinsic component of its structure, which is enough – already

The irony is glorious. Psychoanalysis, the adoptive parent of neurosis, was itself almost sheer hysteria, which means – immediately – still less (we are now told, authoritatively[8]). Rather than being any kind of psychological therapy, it was itself a sophisticated cognitive disorder.[9] It was not dealing with anything, or at least, nothing

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– to cast all simplistic diagrams under suspicion. There is no Oedipus without time-paradox, plague, and cryptography. The Sophoclean tragic fate loop provides a warning that prolongs itself into the present century. It is the attempt to dispose of the Oedipal dilemma that activates it, as a paradoxical disturbance of time.

[8] Scientific psychology now finds the medical category of neurosis wholly superfluous. … Its disappearance from the American Psychiatric Association's authoritative *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (with the third edition, or 'DSM-III', published in 1980) coincides quite precisely with the global transition into the neomodern. It can therefore be quite confidently included among the modern myths. The Encyclopedia of Mental Disorders explains: "There is a difference of opinion over the clinical use of the term neurosis today. It is not generally used as a diagnostic category by American psychologists and psychiatrists any longer, and was removed from the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders in 1980 with the publication of the third edition (it last appeared as a diagnostic category in DSM-II). Some professionals use the term to describe anxious symptoms and associated behavior, or to describe the range of mental illnesses outside of the psychotic disorders (such as schizophrenia, delusional disorder). Others, particularly psychoanalysts (psychiatrists and psychologists who follow a psychoanalytical model of treatment, as popularized by Freud and Carl Jung), use the term neurosis to describe the internal process itself (called an unconscious conflict) that triggers the anxiety characteristic."
http://www.minddisorders.com/Kau-Nu/Neurosis.html

[9] The criticism of psychoanalysis conducted by Karl Popper is manifestly pertinent here. In a way that is typical of 'metaphysical' pseudo-sciences, Popper argues, psychoanalysis tends to *subject criticism to diagnosis*. Its theoretical methods are operationalized – reflexively – *as a defense mechanism*, and thus placed in the service of a pathological complex. Pressing deeper into the corrosive irony of the situation than Popper is willing to, it can be noted that *whatever psychoanalysis offered as a theory of neurosis was absorbed – without final remainder – into a neuroticization of theory*. No sooner was *rationalization* a theme, than it was a model. Rather than neurosis being raised, as an object, to the level of psychoanalytical 'science',

that it could admit to be dealing with. What psychoanalysis in fact encountered is a matter for horror, posthumously, to uncover.

Whatever happened to psychoanalysis happened to neurosis simultaneously, but this is perhaps to misrepresent the causal pattern. In gothic mode, the story resembles nothing so much as the transmission of a curse. With the adoption of neurosis, came the inheritance of a destiny. Lacking Cullen's caution, psychoanalysis flung itself unreservedly into the *neurotic fate* of ontological corruption. The attempt to define a structure of persistent non-existence – even if, or precisely because, this project can only be implicit – becomes completely hysterical (which is, again, not anything than can *really happen*).

Psychoanalysis *falls under* Neurosys, as an elaborate sub-manifestation of the neurotic phenomenon. Scientific orthodoxy inters it, still without understanding, as it relegates neurosis to its dusty storehouse of discarded pseudo-explanatory fabrications, with phlogiston and the aether for neighbors. It is an arcane name for the irritation of non-being. This is the whole of its importance, which is no less extravagant than it has been for centuries. In its popular employment, outliving all psychoanalytical technicalities, neurosis invokes groundlessness no less than it did, already, for Cullen. The main thematic thread is unbroken, and even reinforced. 'Groundless over-reaction' – if not quite a pleonasm – is thickened by compression-waves of redundancy. The entire topic is hysterical. Through the collapse of psychoanalysis, neurosis finds confirmation in the ruin of its final articulate defender. The abyss is clarified.

Neurosis has no psychological foundation. It is an over-reaction, obsessively repeated, without basis in credible fact. Neurotic disorder is (according to medical authority) not anything. Tacitly, therefore, it has already arrived at that intolerable nullity which it obsessively repels. The impossibility is internal. The catastrophe has already taken place.

> "Doctor, I'm worried that I might be neurotic."
> "How worried?"

By disbanding the clinical category of neurosis, the diagnosed over-reaction is only intensifed – even infinitized. It is *worse than we thought*. Perhaps very far worse, insofar

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psychoanalysis was pulled down into the abyss of neurotic exorbitance, acquiring in this descent the status of a psycho-cultural disease.

as it tilts towards the division by zero that sets its impossible asymptote. That *there's nothing the matter* is no source of comfort, but much rather the opposite. Retirement of neurosis only ushers it towards the absolute. This is ironical, of course, and doubly so, given that neurosis is not ironical, at all, but instead immeasurably grave. In large part this is simply because it is not anything, is in fact non-being, insofar as anything can be, but – as with everything touching upon this topic – there is far more to it than that.

Neurosis lacks subjective irony even more than it lacks existence. By necessity, it takes itself far more seriously than makes sense. To such an extent is this true, that neurosis – it can be confidently predicted – would substitute entirely for irony (if only it existed). It's a joke, which is never anything other than a horror story. A neurosis able to laugh at itself would be no longer neurotic, but rather quite sane by superficial assumption (though actually psychotic). It would complete the loop and, in doing so, ground itself in itself. No one thinks this is possible. Instead, irony bleeds out into objectivity through the wound of neurotic groundlessness, and (since excess is our only – obsessive – concern here) far beyond it. Self-subversion is recovered by alien circuitries. The inability of neurosis to laugh at itself has turned into – turns upon – something far worse, as we have already hazily glimpsed.

Here is the *neurotic paradox* (again, compulsively re-iterated). Since neurosis does not exist, you can have nothing real to worry about, which makes your anxiety disproportionate to a still-higher degree. Really, there's *nothing wrong*, and *that is the whole of the syndrome*. Paradox is cognitive vortex.[10]

At this point in the history of neurosis, apprehended at any number of possible scales, we might begin to fear there is nothing wrong. In that case, neurosis retains its hook, in a disturbance without remedy. Fear of the abyss, passing essentially into ontological crisis, is already no longer any mere (empirical) *fear* at all, but rather the threshold of (transcendental) *horror*.[11] Sheer trash disposal from one side is absorption into the darkness from another. That which medical science configures as a dumpster for defective theoretical apparatus, is for horror fiction – the inheritor of neurosis – a vault

[10] In any sufficiently complex system, formal paradox functions as a continuous dynamic factor. "Paradoxes are storms in the sphere of the concept," says Lucca Fraser (in an unrecorded lecture, sampled on Twitter).

[11] … The distinction echoes that between 'fear' (*Furcht*) and 'anxiety' (*Angst*) … Freud and Heidegger …

or crypt, which is to say a repository for determinate non-being (dead things). *Fiction* and *horror* are mutually exalted by the same inner desolation. Neurosis leads through the wastelands into the shadows.

The fictional hypothesis maintains: *It's no coincidence that 'the invisible hand' sounds like the title of a pulp-horror story*. The point only works if the connection, once made, cannot be unmade. There's a ratchet-mechanism, and also an epidemic inclination. Everything the Scottish Enlightenment introduces to formal intelligence can be treated as an artificially-induced neurotic episode. The invisible hand, or spontaneous order (which is only Neurosys apprehended optimistically) designates man's ultimate *unhealthy thought*, one that a more perfectly adapted brain would be quite incapable of entertaining. It names the *obscure thing* we could only hope to explain in some entirely different fashion, in order to pretend 'our' nerves do the work we set for them. In this regard, it can be counted as the most prominent of the morbid eventualities exploiting neurosis as a precursor.

Wikipedia, our techno-prosthesis for common understanding, presents Dr. C. George Boeree of Shippensburg University, author of *A Bio-Social Theory of Neurosis*, as the voice of elevated cultural continuity.[12] His list of traits that typify neurotic cognition is especially noteworthy. We will assume continuous reference to this psychological cocktail of "unpleasant or disturbing thoughts, repetition of thoughts and obsession, habitual fantasizing, negativity and cynicism". Unmistakably, what Boeree sketches here is the profile of a horror-fiction generator or pulp-nightmare machine. The definition of neurosis slithers towards the 'ordinary' condition of the horror writer,

[12] Wikipedia cites C. George Boeree, who enumerates the symptoms of neurosis in their impressively coagulated diversity:
"... anxiety, sadness or depression, anger, irritability, mental confusion, low sense of self-worth, etc., behavioral symptoms such as phobic avoidance, vigilance, impulsive and compulsive acts, lethargy, etc., cognitive problems such as unpleasant or disturbing thoughts, repetition of thoughts and obsession, habitual fantasizing, negativity and cynicism, etc. Interpersonally, neurosis involves dependency, aggressiveness, perfectionism, schizoid isolation, socio-culturally inappropriate behaviors, etc."
The American Heritage Medical Dictionary confirms that neurosis is "no longer used in psychiatric diagnosis." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neurosis
A Bio-Social Theory of Neurosis, Dr. C. George Boeree, Shippensburg University
http://webspace.ship.edu/cgboer/genpsyneurosis.html

according to an order of historical fatality that has already been vividly suggested, from both sides. It is already a *genre*, roughly equivalent to the newly-popularized sense of *pessimism*, when this is taken to mean the chronic affective-attitudinal correlate of cosmic nihilism.[13]

The reference to fiction is inescapable, if 'pessimism' is to be clinically isolated from *the truth*. The pessimist has a distinctive neurotic thought disorder – one that acquires its horrific characteristics, when externally considered, from the irrepressible suggestion that it might be realistic. The complementary *recommendation*, following automatically from this understanding, is that all epistemological criteria need to be shelved when dispelling it. An excessive concern for truth in such cases is scarcely to be distinguished from the malady itself. Mental health is therefore implicitly characterized as a state of therapeutically-directed delusion.[14] Of course, to make this point is already meta-symptomatic, given its identifiable signature of *negativity and cynicism*. To further dwell upon it again re-doubles the self-betrayal (through *obsession*). Reflection, in this zone, begins to appear as inherently neuroticizing. *Bad thoughts* intensify.

The extravagance of neurosis betrays its essential affinity with abstraction. Whether apprehended intentionally, or causally, it overflows all concrete conditions. It is a syndrome and – given its constitutive orientation towards pattern-hunting – even a meta-syndrome. (The 'meta-' prefix itself acquires an unmistakable neurotic aspect.) Attention to the system *as such* is not screened by the distractions of its parts. An advanced phobia extracts itself from local disturbances. It is not the coincidence, but

[13] This construction of 'pessimism' draws heavily upon the super-psychological (cosmic) sense the term acquires in Thomas Ligotti's *The Conspiracy Against the Human Race*, as popularized by Nic Pizzolatto's *True Detective* TV series. Pessimism, released as a cultural 'free radical', is tolerable only within the frame provided by a transcendental quarantine as 'entertainment'. Ligotti genetically confirms this frame, no less than Pizzolatto. A fictional pedigree underwrites an entitlement to strange thoughts. The term's 19th century ancestry, in the transcendental philosophy of will, remains easily legible. Disappointment is not empirical (accidental). Not least among the factors contributing to the relevance of its reference is the direct current from the transcendental philosophy of will into psychoanalysis (a lineage Freud explicitly confirms).

[14] Nietzsche's diagnosis of the will-to-truth as a morbid condition is an inescapable reference. "We possess art lest we perish of the truth."

the distance – and ultimately the gulf – between the occasional trigger and the real phobic 'entity' that characterizes the syndrome.

By etymology, neurosis is a 'disease of the nerves'. It provides an unsustainable answer to the question: *What is it, really, that makes people nervous?* The question is worth keeping, and vulgarizing. Even in the least complex cases, it's difficult to say. 'Nervous conditions' elude local determinacy. The object – when there is one – is only a vehicle, or occasion. There's 'something about it' that provokes anxiety. The specific trigger is no more than an opportunity, or a door. (Every phobia – at an intermediate level of determination – is a fear of doors.) It is not 'symbolism' that is at stake here, either typically, or fundamentally. A chain of associations that transects the object is independent – even 'orthogonal' – in relation to the line of fear, and its order of intensities. Displacement is secondary, and essentially incidental. It is the object *as such* – or *in general* – that substitutes for the dreadful thing.

In its common usage, to be 'nervous' is to be mildly scared, or susceptible to such affect. Sensitivity is inclined towards fear, as everyone knows, all too well. Awareness primarily disturbs, according to the 'pessimist' proposition. What you don't cognitively catch could kill you. The evolutionary story is almost insultingly obvious. Miss enough positive opportunities, and that could kill you, too, or in some other way reduce the frequency of relevant (instinctually-communicative) genes in subsequent generations, which explains the existence of attractions and – most fatally – of even abstract attraction (curiosity). There is rarely great need, however, for affect to be ratcheted up highly in such cases. The consequences of inadequately toned aversion – in contrast – are faster, and more drastic. Unrecognized *bad things* predominate. It is genetically hard-coded – and has to be – that beyond the perimeter of comprehension there are mostly monsters. They are what matters. If there were ever animals that assumed no such thing, they are long dead, the comically-overstated evolutionist trope maintains. Fear is primal. It concerns things that don't permit a second chance.

Lovecraft makes this same case more elliptically. In his principal reflective text on the horror genre,[15] he contends:

[15] … Supernatural Horror in Literature (1925-27) … http://www.hplovecraft.com/writings/texts/essays/shil.aspx … "Because we remember pain and the menace of death more vividly than pleasure, and because our feelings toward the beneficent aspects of the unknown have from the first been captured and formalised by conventional religious rituals, it has fallen to the lot of the darker and

"The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown. These facts few psychologists will dispute, and their admitted truth must establish for all time the genuineness and dignity of the weirdly horrible tale as a literary form. … As may naturally be expected of a form so closely connected with primal emotion, the horror-tale is as old as human thought and speech themselves."

Fangs and claws, venomous animals, poisons, pathogens – constitute a quasi-continuous threat series, ordered by increasing abstraction. Much else could – of course – be added. The extrapolation writes horror automatically. Injuries escalate from lacerations to cryptic syndromes. Monsters sublime from beasts into obscure metaphysical terrors. On the way, primitive fears evolve into subtle phobias, under the guidance of Neurosys (which has always nursed the final sense of aversion).

Neurosys is by definition the reality of the *Old Spasm*, to steal Cullen's nickname (which destiny lent to him). It concludes an evolutionary lineage of fear that only incidentally, and in passing, belongs to the organism. If played backwards, out of the scheduled breakdown, its precursor anxiety-waves lose themselves amid a murmur of threat reports. When the recording runs this way, the thing at the end seems to borrow fear – ransacking the archive of evolutionary terrors – in order to take it somewhere further. As a direct consequence of its historic-philosophical structure, the ontological argument for the divine existence already intimates the nature of *ultimate fear*. No terror has been perfected, until it fuses with the criterion of its own reality. Any fear directed to an object beyond itself misses immanence, and falls prey to the scourge of critique.

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more maleficent side of cosmic mystery to figure chiefly in our popular supernatural folklore. This tendency, too, is naturally enhanced by the fact that uncertainty and danger are always closely allied; thus making any kind of an unknown world a world of peril and evil possibilities. When to this sense of fear and evil the inevitable fascination of wonder and curiosity is superadded, there is born a composite body of keen emotion and imaginative provocation whose vitality must of necessity endure as long as the human race itself. Children will always be afraid of the dark, and men with minds sensitive to hereditary impulse will always tremble at the thought of the hidden and fathomless worlds of strange life which may pulsate in the gulfs beyond the stars, or press hideously upon our own globe in unholy dimensions which only the dead and the moonstruck can glimpse."

Neurosys takes the meta-conveyor down a level, into the basement. This is still to follow the thread of the unknown, all the way into neurotic dread. A line is crossed, after which *nothing that has ever happened can be explanatory*. Cullen has already prepared us for this. His method is, in fact, exemplary. Default naturalism is meticulously preserved, through a sign functioning as an evocation of the unknown.

Fears arise from the vulnerabilities of the organism, tested across evolutionary time, but horror betrays an alien ancestry – and ultimately a stressor beyond ancestry. It does not concern anything that natural selection has had the opportunity to select for. Empirical culling machines are the sculptors of fear. They teach evasion, through their negative artistry. Whatever survives – *remains* – has been taught the value of fright, but only, strictly, by precedent. Even here, it is worth insisting upon greater precision. The evolutionary lesson is taught by *that which doesn't survive*. The 'educational' encounters are not transmitted forwards, but rather extinguished. The genome is a record of missed experiences, or avoided calamities. It is a biological anti-phenomenology of terror.

Horror requires a further step into domains that deep phylogeny has never known, even in the negative sense, instantiated by the selective test. It is only indirectly, by strained analogy, for instance, that one can *fear* existential risk. Species-exterminating hazards tolerate no school-rooms. Evolved aversions can only reach out to them by way of monstrous escalations in abstraction. Genealogical registries are unable to provide a resource for the anticipation of unencountered cosmic catastrophes, of a kind that exceed anything the species – or even its distant predecessors – has ever touched upon. In terms of any conceivable 'evolutionary psychology' therefore, horror has to be marked as excessive, or over-reactive. Without neurosis as a 'bootloader' it is scarcely imaginable that biological possibility could encompass it.

Neurosis develops itself *between* fear and horror. To generalize with greater definition – and precariousness – it tends to coincidence with *the fear of horror*.[16] Neurosis cannot

[16] The words of Franklin D. Roosevelt's first inaugural address (1933) impose themselves irresistibly at this point: "… let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is … fear itself — nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance …" (central ellipsis in original). The genre taking shape in this statement is the crucial 20th century innovation of political-economic therapy. This recognition of *the cybernetic excitability of fear* would proceed to dominate the new 'macroeconomics' while integrating it, implicitly,

yet be horror (any more than 'horror fiction' can). Horror lies across the line. The consummate intuition of horror, like psychosis, or the Land of the Dead, belongs only to the other side. It can only be *nothing* to us. There is no theoretically-plausible way 'our' genomes could even shadow it (without Neuorosys). The only information available concerns missing information. In horror, the unidentified mega-threat condenses drastically into a definite yet singularly abstract affect. Only here does affectivity commensurate to the adventure of transcendental cognition. Nothing (in-itself) should not intrude – yet it does.

Disproportion is the Great Connector. A quarter-millennium after Cullen negatively defined neurosis (by its intractability to accessible physiological explanation), the designation of this psychological syndrome as *excessive* remains – more than ever – the guiding clue. Neurotic disproportion is radicalized by neuro-scientific abolition. Belatedly, it reveals itself as the psychological complement to the discovery of sensitivity to initial conditions within nonlinear dynamic systems. The adjustment of a moth's wings throws open gates of phobic extremity. Scale neutrality subtracts all confident distinction between the remote echo of a cough and the violent death of a sun.

Neurosis is built out of 'complexes'. Suspend the temptation to dismissal of merely 'figurative' language, and the question arises: *What does the Oedipus complex share with the Military-Industrial Complex, beside complexity?* There is a ready answer, which is *scaling-organization*, the correlate of disproportion, expressed through power laws, serial envelopment, and multi-level self-sameness. Individuation is a scale-free concept. Scale-up, and Neurosys thickens.

To be part of something else need not be disturbing. One might naturally suspect that the 'something else' would tend to prevent it being so. *Why is cellular panic like cancer?* Even among those dubious about this subsidiary question, few would fail to catch the point being made. An organic component in rebellion against the whole is a disease (and a neurological component in rebellion is a nervous disease – a neurosis). While subsumption is not quite (or necessarily) digestion, neither is it something altogether different. Subtle swallowings are suggested insidiously. It is unnecessary – and even

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within a national-administrative mass psychiatry, oriented to collective mood-management.

distracting – to note as an annex that close to 100 per cent of all animals die from being eaten alive.

According to genre tradition, it's done through tentacles. '*Whose' tentacle are you?* Empirical cephalopods won't answer that, but they retract attention back into the question. Fear of tentacles draws all its seriousness from the horror of being one. Octopii are remarkably adept at hiding, too, if not quite in the way any *tentacle matrix* is. (Puppets work the same philosophical function.)

Neurosis was always made up, out of extravagant fear. It now describes a derelict plot of cultural space, far from completely abandoned, but collapsing into ruin following its vacation by reputable medicine, and the subsequent incursion of other things. Who will inherit this grim estate? Among the cybernetically consistent near-future destinies that might be attributed to neurosis, its take-over by horror fiction can be counted among the most compelling. Psychoanalysis, we have already seen, was incapable of supporting it. In this case, too, disproportion provides the glue.

Neurosis lends itself to fiction, inherently. It was made up. (If we are not yet entitled to say *made itself up*, that is nevertheless our definite – inexorable – destination.) Yet a measure of qualification is called for at this point. Neurosis is defined, consistently, *against* any state of radical delusion. It is not psychosis. Hallucination plays no part in it. Its cognitive disorder is peculiarly orthogonal to the dimension of truth. There are even ominous hints of diagonal complicity. It follows that, as a diagnosis, or even merely an accusation, the description of thought as 'neurotic' does not work to attribute falsity to its content. That it might be mistaken for some such factual correction is at best a convenience, and actually a reflexively perverse, if not always cynically mendacious subterfuge. It is – 'in fact' – difficult to suppress the suspicion that the death of neurosis as any kind of usable analytical category owes much to this. To describe what is *wrong* with neurosis – whether in a clinical context, or outside one – almost necessarily involves lying about it, by expedient suggestion most typically. The 'wrongness' of neurosis has no definite epistemological basis.

Within its general – as well as its more specific philosophical – acceptation, neurosis has been constructed as a soft insanity. The tradition – perpetuated by schizoanalysis – counterposes neurotic failure to psychotic genius. Neurosis is the dilute lunacy – or sub-schizophrenic disorder – that all must, to some degree, bear. Its normality has

commonly been emphasized.[17] 'Normal' yet non-existent, of course, since neurotic disorder is not anything still recognized by reputable medicine, nevertheless, cultural inertia preserves its situation as a third term between sanity and psychosis. Neurosis functions as a psychological antechamber, even if now a fictional one, epitomizing still in its anxious unreality a *false sense security*. It is a liminal condition. What comes next is worse. Lovecraft's most widely cited passage invokes nothing but this:

"The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far. The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the light into the peace and safety of a new dark age."

The sciences compose a disassembled nightmare. Their reductionism, understood in a micro-sociological sense – as a division of intellectual labor – protects them from their own implicit, integral insight. Specialization conserves sanity, by impeding the *lucid* integration of knowledge. In their professional departmentalization, the sciences spare humanity from the totality of what is known. What they are bringing together lies beyond what any of them can see. Scientific vision – conceived neurotically – is tolerable to humanity only in its disunity. In its tacit retrochronic aspect, corresponding to the psychosis it suspends, it is (already) a shattered horror, whose madness is implicit – but in shards. The whole is Hell.

What is *the Call of Cthulhu*, really? Not the story, but the thing named by the story? Like neurosis, it is nothing (of course). No one confuses it with the cry of an animal. It cannot be locally heard. It is a convention, a coming together, and even a *summoning* – but one that proceeds from the other side. The Call is a correlation[18] – a "piecing

[17] The anthropological ubiquity of neurosis – at least among denizens of modern societies – was to become a central psychoanalytical thesis. While the transparent professional self-interest exhibited in this judgment is difficult to dismiss, it is likely to remain among the most enduring of psychoanalytical 'discoveries'.

[18] This is not, of course, the 'correlation' of the speculative realist 'anti-correlationists', relating a subject to an object of knowledge, but rather a correlation between disparate data, sharing a consistent ontological status (factuality), and differentiated only by empirical distribution, not by transcendental distinction. If Lovecraft is an 'anti-

together", to repeat Lovecraft's words. When grasped in accordance with the preliminary and ultimately untenable temporal schema accessed most conveniently by literary narration, a system emerges, always in pieces, webbing together disparate fragments of neural excitement, cognitive provocations, or suggestive signs. As scattered clues are compiled, the horror thickens. The Call is collected and – in a circuit – it is the process of collection. There is no more to Neurosys than this.

It is not death that defines the limit of Lovecraftian horror, but madness. Its 'object' is something intolerable to thought. *The idea* of madness functions as a screen, protecting the story from its own content. Stated a little differently, and with greater affinity to the practicalities of literary production, it is a device that serves as a pretext for the unsaid. That which cannot – *of course* – be spoken, can nevertheless be indicated, and even allocated narrative position. Within the terms of the fictional contract, madness is the unreachable, because communication cannot be taken there, yet it may be permitted an avatar, or delegate. The literary madman serves as the ('empirical') doppelgänger for an unrealizable narrative function, attesting to a semiotic breakdown occurring elsewhere. Madness is the end (beyond the end), an end quite different to the completion of the story, though never less than its shadow culmination. It anchors the horror tale, in particular, through relation to an asymptote. This consummate insanity – which can be shown but never shared – marks a narrative limit, coincident with the utterly unspeakable.

When cast under the sign of the Call, or the correlation, madness reverses sign, and becomes an indicator of epistemological over-performance. Work things out, too far, and it looms. Neurotic defense-mechanisms are then seen – approximately – for what they are. Ritualization substitutes procedure for awareness – based on the latent understanding that *nothing could be worse than awareness*. The latency is the defense. *Only the unexamined life is livable*, murmurs the persistent neurotic proposition.

If there has never been 'a moment of horror', it is due to neurosis. The continued functionality of the neurotic screening procedure is seen nowhere as clearly as in its application to literary agitation. It is perhaps remarkable that – given the firm scientific

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correlationist' – and this is by no means an inevitable judgment – it is through pessimistic anticipation of the trend of a socio-epistemological process, and not as an ontological refusal of the modern philosophical dispensation.

consensus on the ontological disreputability of neurosis – the determination of literary horror as a neuroticization does not appear remotely controversial.

Neurosis is assumed to be explanatory, if only because it designates a principle of over-reaction. Even when, as is typical, one wants to go much further than saying *Lovecraft goes too far*, the attribution of neurosis is a start. It is a gesture to be recommended both as a private circumscription of disturbance, and a public decontamination. The application of neurosis, as a category, produces an instantaneous dissolution of the theoretical into the psychological. Suggestions revert to symptoms, whose propositional characteristics are collapsed – by controlled explosion – into their own genesis. *How could anybody think such things?* Pathologization economizes the question.

By strong – if subterranean – implication, neurosis is *accidental*. Unlike psychosis, it never rises above the level of self-evident contingency, irrespective of the generality attributed to it. In common usage, it ascribes empirical docility to a condition, which might – therefore – quite easily have been entirely otherwise. To name it is almost already a pretended avoidance, and a categorization among manageable facts. Its attraction as a ward against psychotic doom safeguards its continuing cultural circulation.

On the basis of even the most cursory historical reflection, there is an extraordinary irony here. Neurosis – initiated to announce a deficiency of observable physiological determinacy – concludes as a side-step into psychological *causality*. Furthermore, it has ceased to be a mark of scientific incitement, but has rather evolved into a delegation *to science* (vaguely conceived), in order to proceed without interruption somewhere else. 'Science', popularized into a reservoir of common notions, provides a resource of tranquillization. *We all know what neurosis means*, at exactly the moment that scientific medicine has withdrawn its accreditation.

It would exceed the ambition of this essay to probe too deeply into the vein of Lovecraft's *horrible ideas*. Yet we approach our conclusion here, because it is where horror has brought us. According to the now-settled narrative, the dark turn took place during his residence in Red Hook, Brooklyn.[19] Among the area's *teeming* immigrants, "his

[19] "He only lived here until 1926 but during his stay, possessed of anxiety and neurosis, he practically starved himself." http://www.boweryboyshistory.com/2015/08/h-p-lovecrafts-very-bizarre-hatred-of-red-hook-brooklyn.html

racist views solidified into a neurosis".[20] Michel Houellebecq has suggested – with exceptional boldness – that the essence of Lovecraftian horror refers itself to this psychological passage. Providence sets this ultimately disturbing attitudinal inclination in direct collision with the *sacred* as it is configured in the terms of our reigning post-theistic Christianity.[21]

Houellebecq's amateur diagnosis of Lovecraft's New York-catalyzed "full-fledged racist neurosis" is admirable for its combination of unflinching directness and productive, analytical exploitation. In respect to this *coldness*, it displays a measure of originality. When stripped down to its core, however, it is the extreme consistency of this *critical syndrome* that demands recognition. The recognition that "HP Lovecraft was a neurotic racist"[22] evolves into a vacuous formality.

In a 2005 *Salon* article,[23] Laura Miller takes 'neurosis' as the key to Lovecraft's literary achievement, elaborating upon the description with exceptional self-consciousness. "In

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[20] From the introduction to *New Critical Essays on H.P. Lovecraft*, edited by David Simmons.

[21] Atheism is – of course – a dissident Protestant sect, in extrapolated continuity with profound religious tradition. The death of God was graphically depicted by Christianity at its origin. The commandment is this: *Subtract belief in God in order better to consummate belief in Man, and in his – or perhaps now (already) xer – divinization.* Our panoply of sacred ethico-social values fall out of this religious reformation automatically.

[22] From: http://thenightblogger.com/2015/11/24/hp-lovecraft-was-a-neurotic-racist-but-damn-if-he-wasnt-right-when-it-came-to-the-ocean/

[23] 'Master of Disgust' (12/02/2005), Laura Miller, http://www.salon.com/2005/02/12/lovecraft/
Miller concludes: "If Lovecraft, unlike Poe or King, hasn't the psychological acuity to get under our skin and make us feel real fear, he does offer us the spectacle of his own unfettered morbidity. And as part of the irony that Lovecraft detected in all great horrors, that morbidity proved to be spectacularly fecund. The energy of his psychopathology fueled the creation of the vast, visionary Cthulhu Mythos, an invention big enough for other writers and artists to crawl into, inhabit and expand upon. There's exhilaration in witnessing that energy allowed to run loose, without shame, without self-consciousness and without limit. Which is not to say it's healthy, let alone wholesome. No, I wouldn't call it wholesome at all." The combination of courageous engagement and subtle evasion in this passage captures the cultural tension at stake with extraordinary adeptness.

the Freud-crazed '50s and '60s it became fashionable to denounce Lovecraft's fiction as 'neurotic,'" she observes, "to which the only conceivable reply is: Duh. How could anyone think of presenting such an observation as an insight when neurosis lies palpitating on the surface of the work?" Melding the perspectives of the critic and the amateur clinician, she contends that: "The kernel of Lovecraft's neurosis is a hopeless tangle of sex, race and bodily decay, fed by the tragedies and frustrations of his private life." It is the neurosis, specifically, that the reader latches upon: "These tales are veritable carnivals of anxiety, repression and rage; that's the source of their appeal."

There is unquestionably enough 'racism' in Lovecraft – by any conceivable definition of this term – to keep everybody immersed in moral terror to the limit of their attention span. Yet if the term is to be used exclusively requires a still more comprehensive scope, in which it serves as a proxy for an even more all-encompassing cultural offense, comprehending every discriminatory and bio-essentialist social '-ism' (anti-semitism, generalized cis-heterosexism, common misogyny, ableism ... it is not until we reach 'speciesism' that we encounter – due only to Lovecraft's love of cats – some plausible horizon to mandatory socio-cultural denunciation). To this list we can add both overt fascist sympathies *and* (supplemental) reactionary cultural attachments. If Lovecraft's ideas are not socially intolerable, it is hard to imagine how anything could be.

The truly cyclopean *empirical* offense distracts from a truth that is potentially still more upsetting. Lovecraft's (never quite) "full-fledged racist neurosis"[24] tends to the transcendental. It inclines to the apprehension of race[25] *as such* in horrified terms. Beyond the flaking surface of convenient genealogical identification (and the hopeful hypothesis of the patronymic), heredity is an occult power. Biological origins are intrinsically uncertain. They provide an indistinct object for scientific curiosity precisely because they exceed casual comprehension. What would it be, then to 'fall back' upon identity? There is no home there, to which one might safely return, but only the dark secrets of ancestry, contaminated with hidden, alien strains, and destining a return to

[24] From Houellebecq, *H. P. Lovecraft: Against the World, Against Life*.

[25] 'Race' used here in the sense of the *concrete configuration of the ultra-modern ethical absolute*, of course, in its negative aspect. Negative, primarily, because of the consensus promoted by *public science*, and endorsed by the United Nations, that race – like neurosis – *does not exist*. Racism is thus determined authoritatively, and essentially, as an over-reaction, directed at – or provoked by – nothing. *Neurotic racism* approaches a pleonasm, or ontological twin-effect.

the sea. No insight is more distinctively 'Lovecraftian' than that which glimpses the cryptic Outsideness of the inside, and then recoils, seized by unbounded repulsion, into the delusive security of some unstable, liminal space – such as the edge of a mirror, or family portrait – where interiority is compromised beyond redemption. The hideous other is found – *rediscovered* – deep inside (where exact natural science, too, is sure to find it).

Lovecraft is notably impolite about the 'other'. Some never wholly explicit terror of genetic entropy makes miscegenation a supplementary phobia, beside that triggered by alien peoples. Abominable *regressions* populate his nightmares with a still more horrible insistence. Identity is besieged, superficially, by foreign masses, and inchoate demographic mixtures, but is then – with far greater profundity – undermined at the level of its most basic foundations by insidious processes of hereditarian subversion. That there are tempestuous extremities of Lovecraftian racism is beyond all question, but there is no resilient Lovecraftian identitarianism (except as a cultural legacy, sacrificed in literary contemplation of the Outer Gods).

If neurosis has an archetype, or consummate teleo-historical realization, Lovecraft attains it. He stresses the brain to the outer edges of groundless hyper-irritability in order – by inevitable coincidence – to think the worst thing in the world. No reasonable understanding of his achievement is separable from its unqualified denunciation. The only alternative to an attribution of radical personal culpability is an invocation of Neurosys – and that is the unthinkable (in-itself).

It is the destiny of horror to suggest Neurosys, by uploading the thought-processes of the human individual into an enveloping monstrosity. It doesn't begin from anywhere nice, and certainly not from any place that would be doctrinally acceptable to the Atheo-Oecumenic Ecclesiocracy. It begins from neurosis, and we have seen what that means, through attention to its contemporary practical usage. Neurosys is the ontologically-resilient correlate *of what has actually happened*. The natural sciences – comprising our sole cultural resource of institutional counter-fiction – have systematically consigned it to utter marginality, even as they ensure, through their intrinsic process, that we will meet it soon.